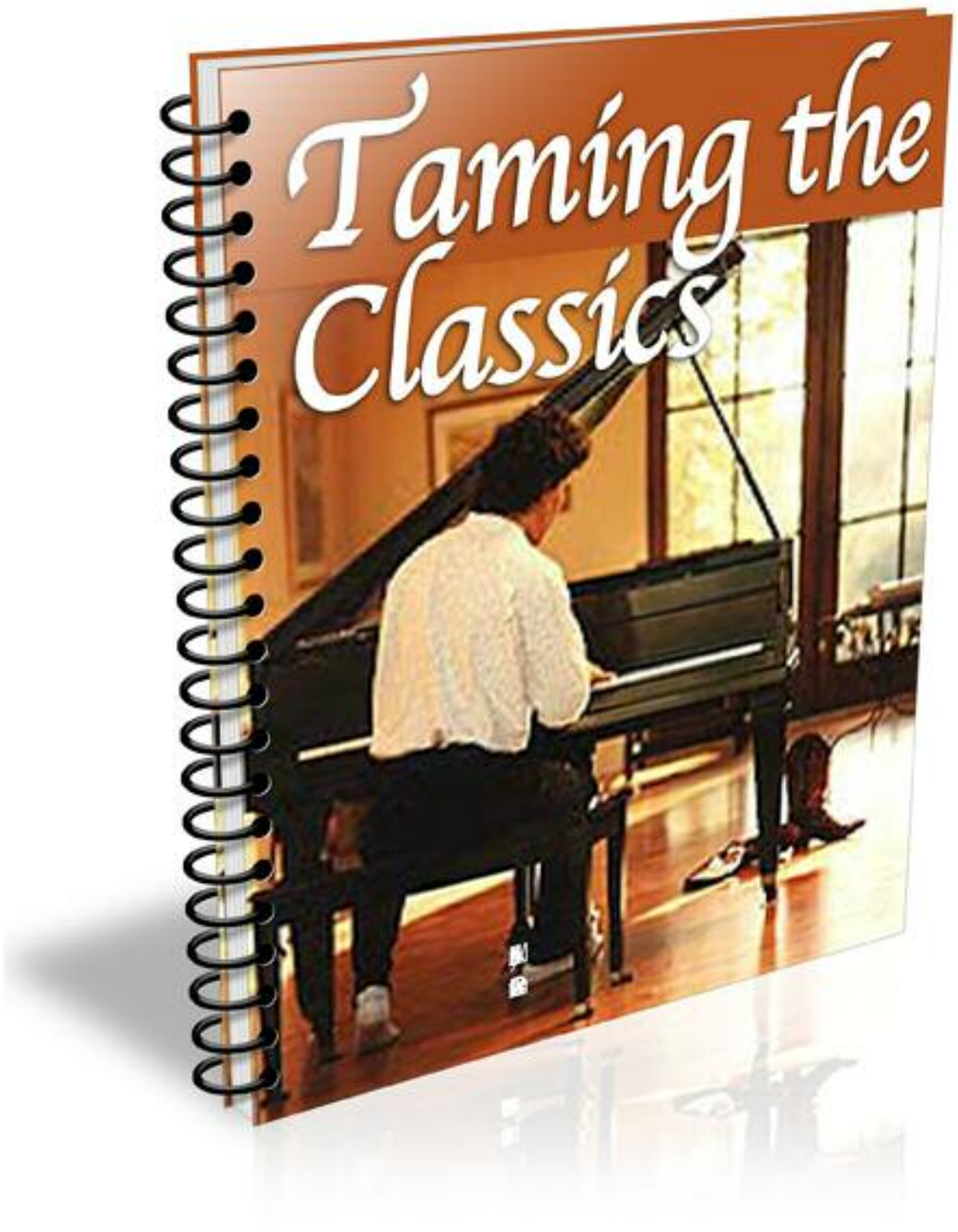

Taming the
Classics

LET'S REVIEW THE BASICS AGAIN

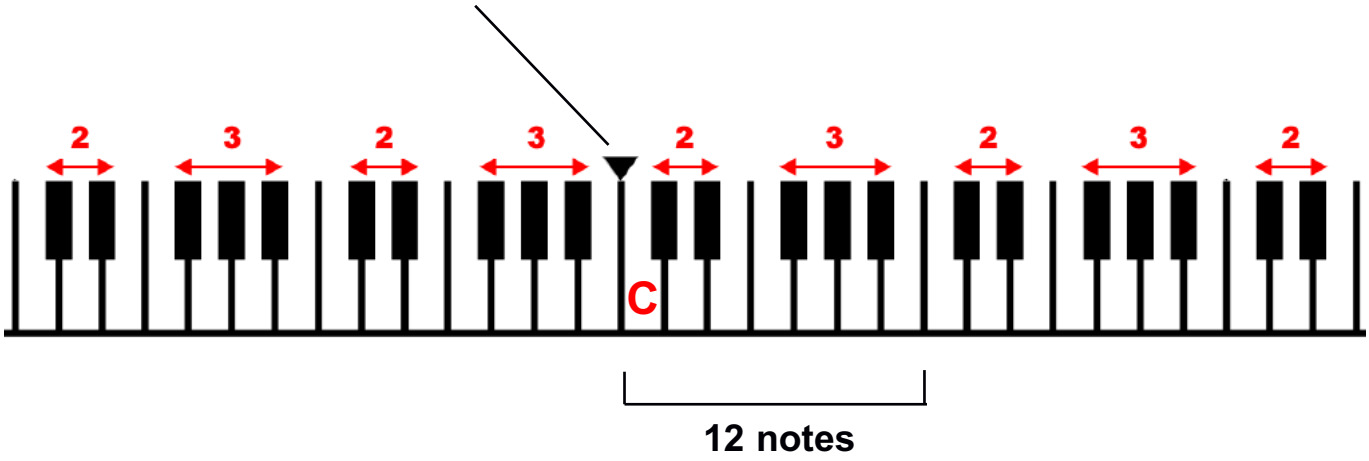
STEP 1

GETTING TO KNOW THE KEYBOARD

Notice how the pattern of the keys repeats itself.

See how there are two black keys then three black keys - then two again - then three and so on

IMPORTANT! The tiny black arrow in the keyboard diagrams always indicates MIDDLE C the C nearest the centre of your piano.



Each pattern contains the **SAME 12 notes** but at higher or lower pitches.

Think of Mickey Mouse singing a high C note and Pavarotti singing a low C note – same note but at different pitches.

THE WHITE KEYS

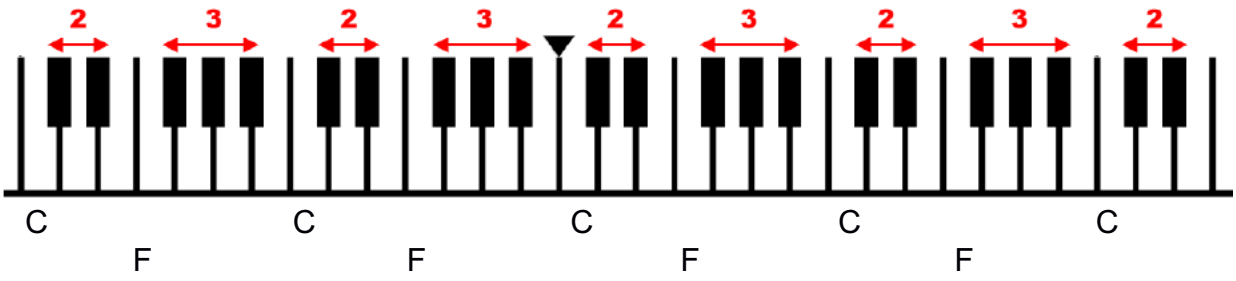
These notes are represented by the first seven letters of the alphabet ....

A, B, C, D, E, F and G repeated at different pitches.

It is important that you are able (eventually) to name ALL the white notes.

Use the pattern of the BLACK keys to help you.

For instance, notice that the C keys are the keys to the left of the ‘2’ black keys or that the F keys are one key to left of the ‘3’ black keys.



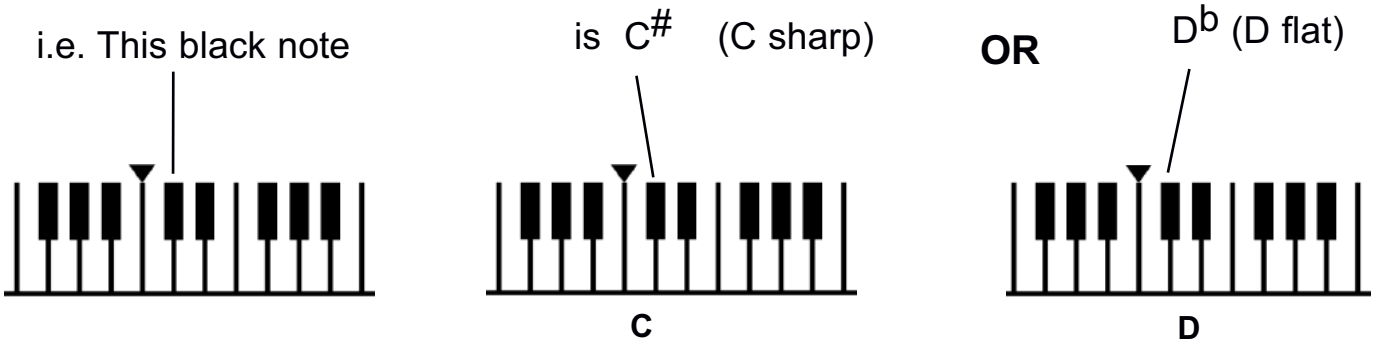
Using the black keys to guide you see if you can find the following notes and where they are repeated.

(G, B, A, D, C, E)

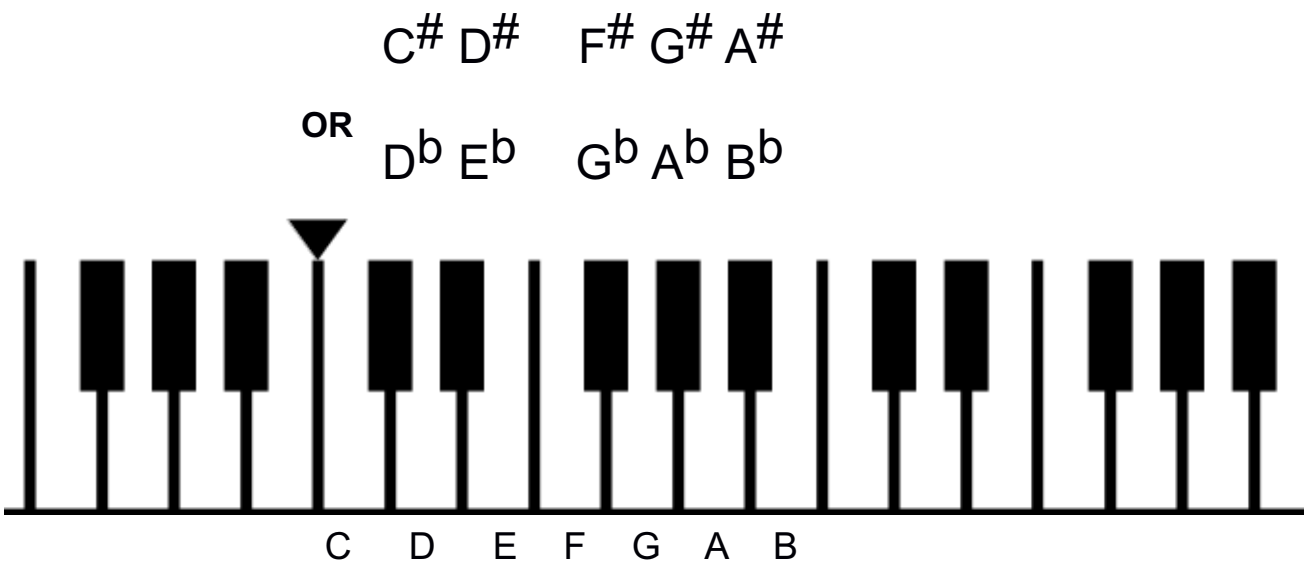
THE BLACK KEYS

The black keys are known as either SHARPS ($^{\#}$) or FLATS (^{b})
(don't worry about WHY - just memorize it all for now)

They are named using the white key NEAREST to them on their left or right.



Can you see how the other black keys are named

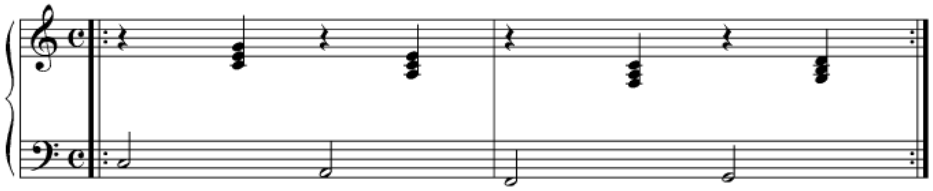


REMEMBER - DON'T ASK WHY - JUST ACCEPT IT FOR NOW

Basic Musical Notation

So what do all the lines and symbols MEAN?

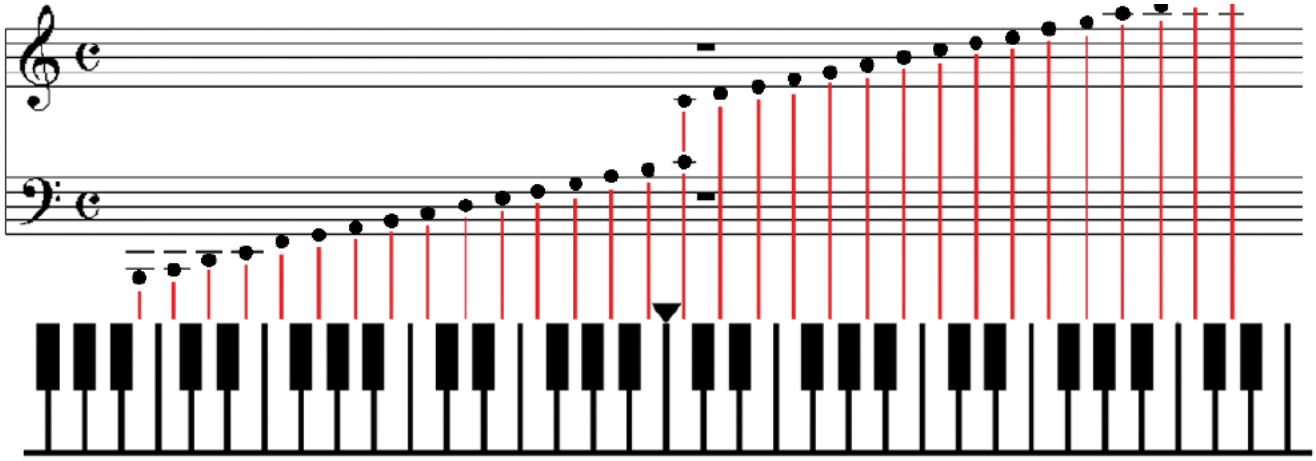
It's simple...



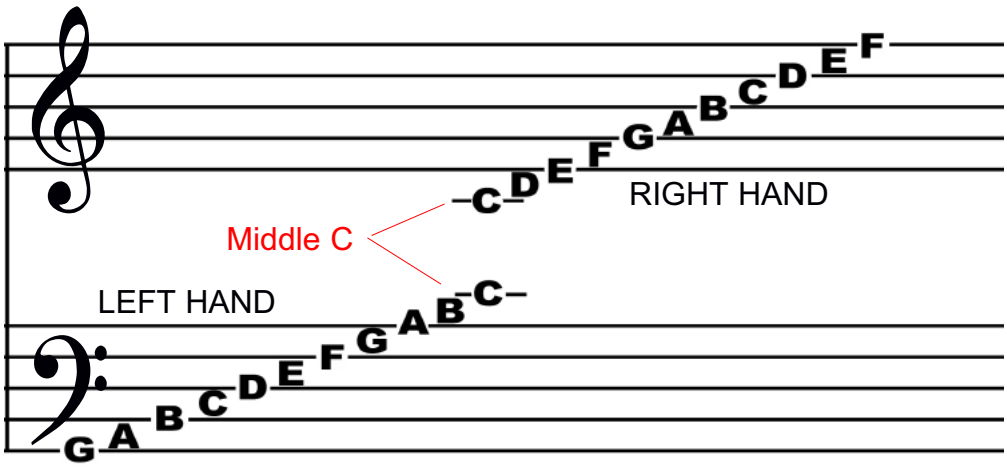
The **TOP** set of lines (and the spaces between them) represent keys to the RIGHT of middle C on your piano that are often played with the **RIGHT** HAND. (The symbol 𝄞)

The **BOTTOM** set of lines (and the spaces between them) represent keys to the LEFT of middle C that are often played with your **LEFT** HAND. (The symbol 𝄢)

The two sets of lines are 'split' at MIDDLE C - which is indicated by a separate small line **either** below the Right Hand lines **or** above the Left Hand lines



Or look at it this way



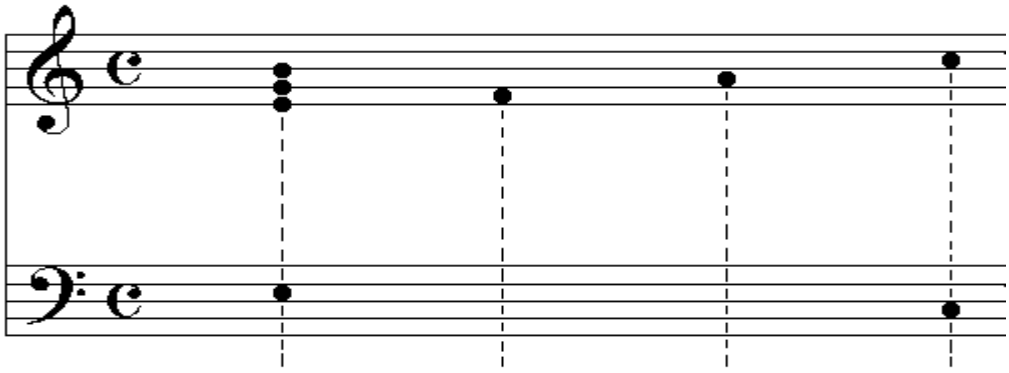
JUST LIKE READING A BOOK

We read music in the same way that we read the sentences of a novel – **from the left of the page to the right.**

Getting back to our ‘dots’ on the Lines and Spaces. As we scan from left to right we play those keys (notes) that the dots on the Lines and Spaces represent.

Should there be SEVERAL dots (notes) in the SAME VERTICAL PLANE we must play these keys SIMULTANEOUSLY.

Read from left to right



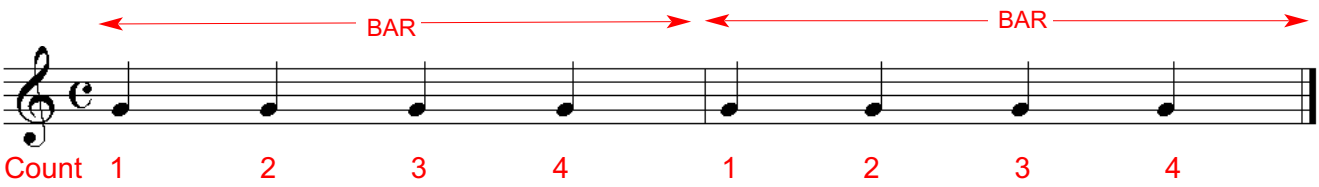
Order of play	1st	2nd	3rd	4th

BARS & BEATS

To make music easier to follow it is divided into segments called BARS.
BARS are divided into BEATS.

The most commonly used rhythm is 4 BEATS in EACH BAR.

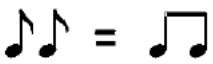
= 1 BEAT



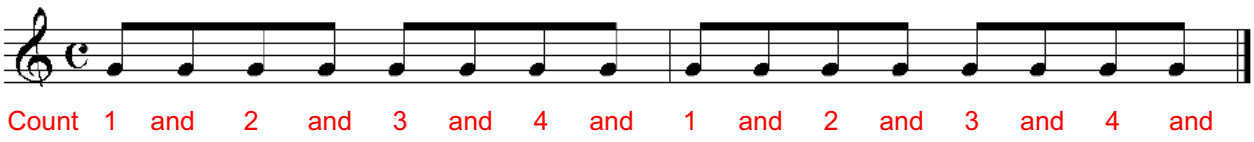
A beat with a ‘hook’ on it is a HALF BEAT.
You could play up to 8 half beats in each bar.

= 1/2 BEAT

To make half beats easier to write out, if there are two, three or four in a row they are grouped together by joining the hooks of their tails.

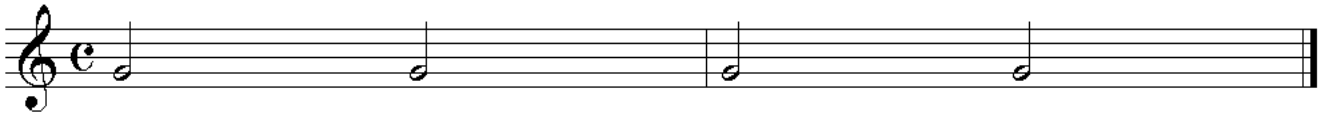


So 8 HALF beats are written:



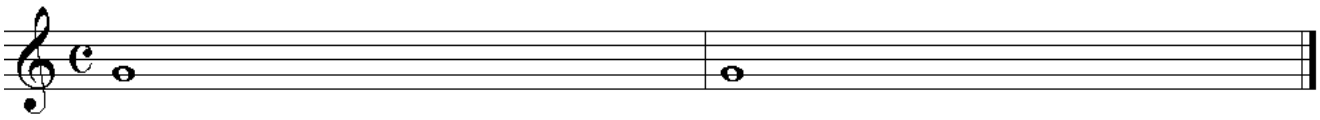
Notice that half beats are counted with the use of the word ‘and’ (or the symbol +).
This means we don’t have to start counting out too many numbers.

Notes can be HELD for 2 beats (hold each note DOWN for 2 beats) **= 2 BEATS**



Count (1 2) (3 4) (1 2) (3 4)

Notes can be HELD for 4 beats (hold each note DOWN for 4 beats) **= 4 BEATS**



Count (1 2 3 4) (1 2 3 4)

Periods of **silence** are shown by symbols called RESTS.

Count 1 2 3 (4) 1 2 (3 4) 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 (+) (1 2 3 4)

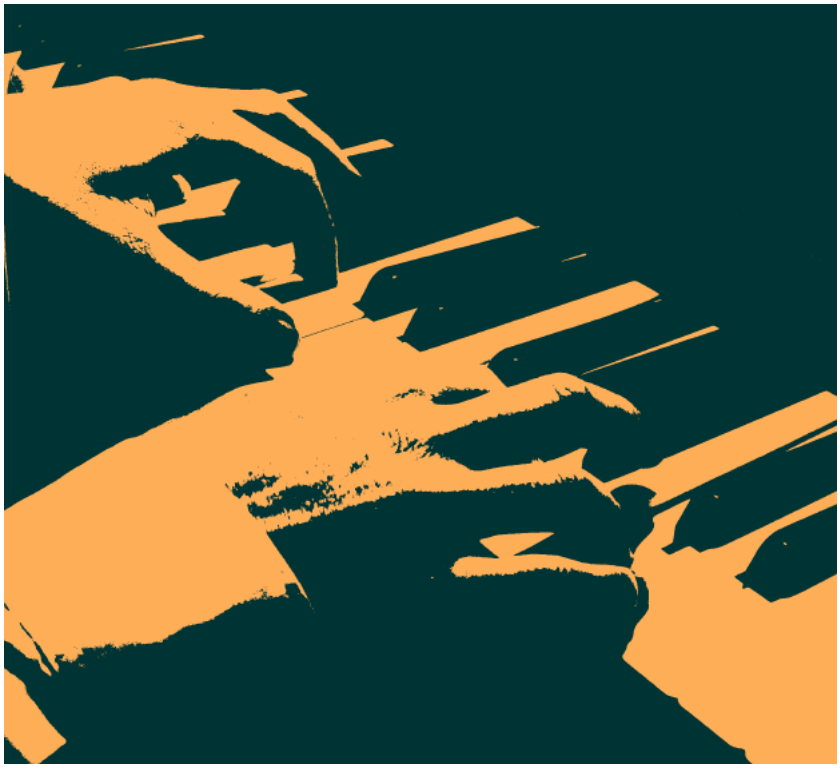
A DOT placed BESIDE a note means you extend the duration of the note by another HALF it's length - ie.

= 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ BEATS

= 3 BEATS

Etc

ADDITIONAL THEORY



KEY SIGNATURES

You will hear musicians saying “What ‘key’ is the song in?”
When you play all the white notes from one C up to another you have played the SCALE of C major. If you write a melody or chord progression based on that scale you are playing in the KEY of C major - simple as that.

Since there are lots of scales there are lots of ‘KEYS’. (Don’t worry about WHY)
Some have a certain number of sharps or flats.

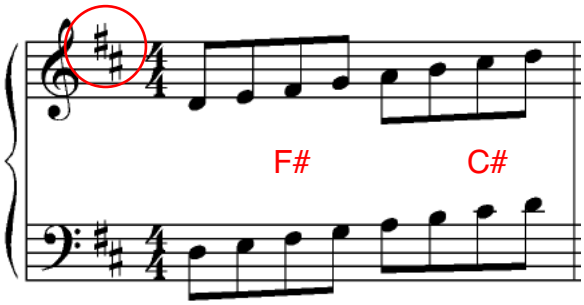
For instance the SCALE of Bb is Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G, A, back to Bb
Can you see there are two flat notes - Bb and Eb

In written notation - instead of writing in a sharp or flat EVERY time it occurs they decided to just write them at the start so that you know which KEY you are playing in.

So.. if you see sharps or flats at the START of a piece of music you will know that any note that falls on those lines or spaces has to be a sharp or flat.

For example

The KEY of ‘C’ - NO sharps or flats



The KEY of ‘D’ -
This has TWO sharps C# and F#

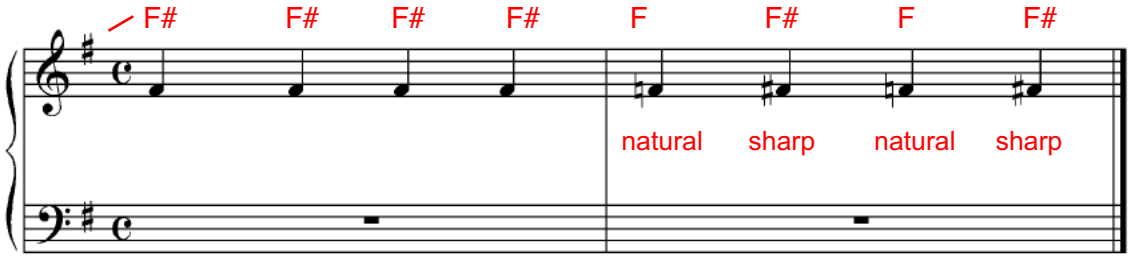
Notice the two sharps at the start of the bar - this means all ‘C’s and ‘F’s are sharp

The KEY of ‘Bb’ -
This has TWO flats Bb and Eb

Notice the two flats at the start of the bar - this means all ‘B’s and ‘E’s are flat

The ‘NATURAL’ symbol

A key signature may indicate that a certain note is to be sharp or flat but IF at times that note is to be played ‘naturally’ (NOT sharp or flat) then a ‘natural’ symbol is put beside it. If it is then to be sharpened again in the same bar a sharp symbol is placed beside it.

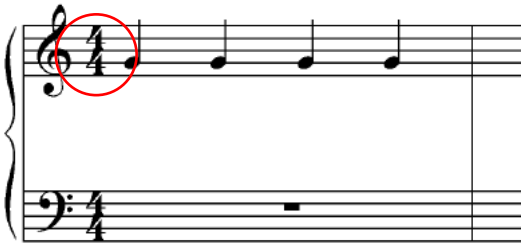


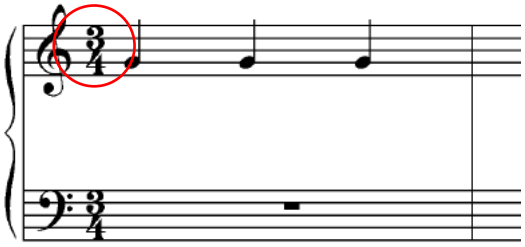
TEMPO

Mostly you have been playing music which has four beats in each bar
This is known as 4/4 time or ‘compound time (C)

You have also played a few tunes with three beats to a bar (Like a waltz)
This is known as 3/4 time

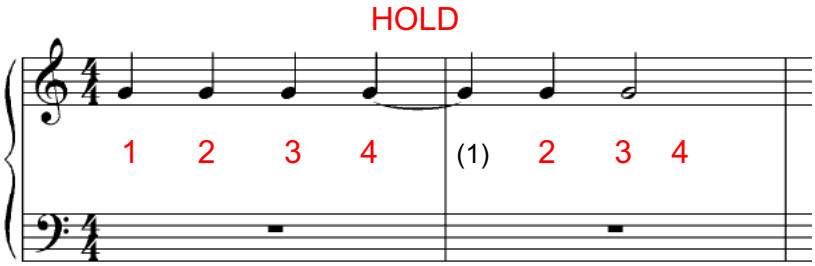
So, when you see these type of numbers at the start of a tune you will know what ‘tempo’ you are to play in - (how many beats to the bar).





TIES

If you see a CURVED LINE joining two notes that are EXACTLY the same this means you HOLD the note for the entire length of both notes (join the lengths together)
Remember DON’T play the second note IF there is a curved line connecting them



REPEATS

If you see a thick and thin line with two dots at the end of a section of music this means you are to REPEAT the entire section

REPEAT

MUSICAL 'LANGUAGE'

In order for a composer to convey in written notation exactly HOW they want a sight reader to play a piece they use certain words or symbols that have certain meanings.

For instance
"f' stands for 'forte' which means loud - 'ff' stands for VERY loud and so on

'p' stands for 'piano' which means softly - 'pp' stands for Very soft

'mf' stands for 'medium loud - 'mp' stands for 'medium soft'

You may see words like 'Allegro' which means 'fast tempo' or 'Largo' which means 'very slow'

If you want to explore musical language in more depth there are plenty of books that deal with this in greater detail or there are lots of internet sites dedicated to musical theory.

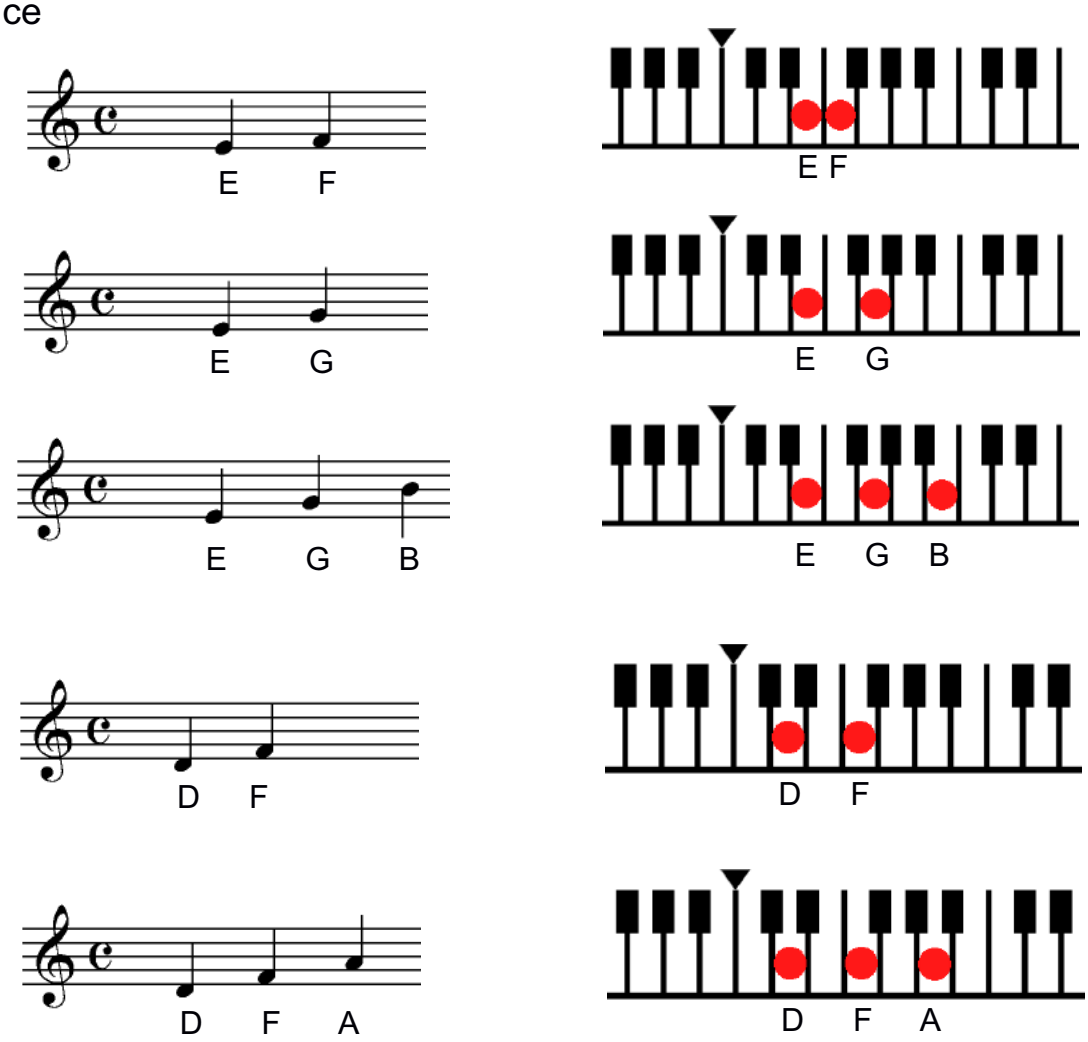
The main purpose of pianoforall is to give you information you CAN'T find elsewhere!

SEEING THE NOTATION IN TERMS OF ‘DISTANCES’

There are several ways to sight read - obviously you can simply learn the names of all the lines and spaces and get to know where they are on the piano.

But there is another way you can approach sight reading. You can see lines and spaces as DISTANCES apart

For instance



Most melodies have many notes close together, otherwise the music would sound rather dis-jointed so you will be able to use this method of sight reading quite often.

MEMORISING THE LINES AND SPACES

I'm sure everyone has heard the phrase "Every Good Boy Deserves Football" and of course this is used to help memorise the lines of the Right Hand staff in musical notation.

This really IS the best way to do it. There is a special 'Note Finder' on the next page which you can print out but it is still best to use your memory.

Here are the usual tricks.. Check this on your NOTE FINDER

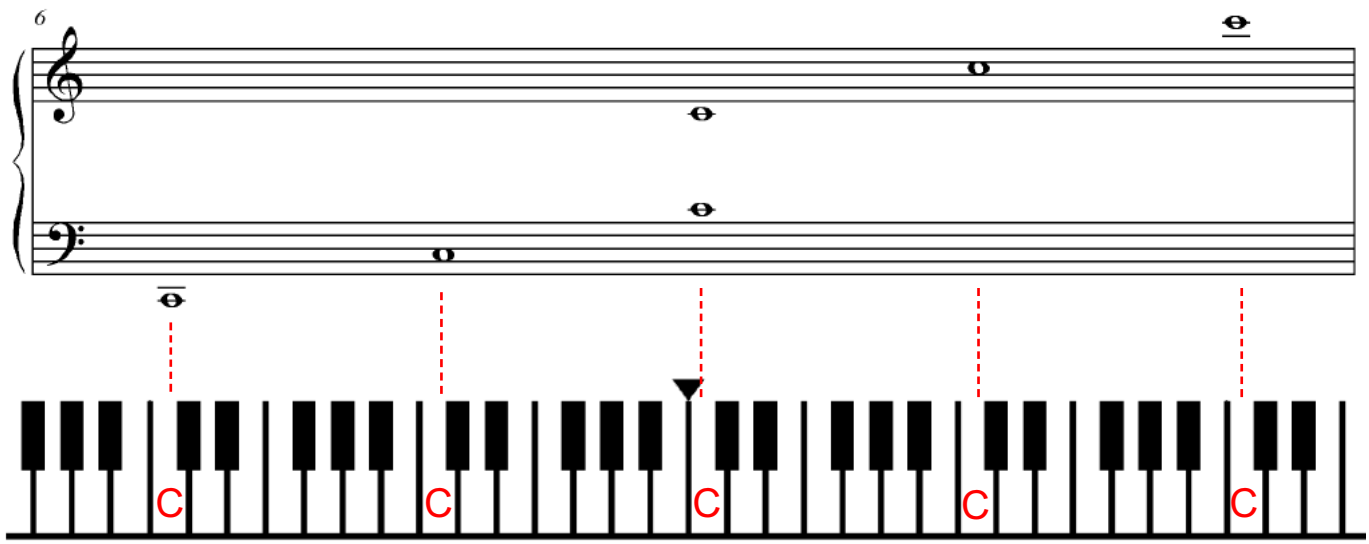
RIGHT HAND LINES	**E**very **G**ood **B**oy **D**eserves **F**ootball
RIGHT HAND SPACES	**F A C E**

LEFT HAND LINES	**G**ood **B**oys **D**on't **F**righten **A**nimals
LEFT HAND SPACES	**A C E** **G**arage

Then notice that the Lines and Spaces above and below the Right Hand lines have the same pattern. This is the same for the Left Hand.

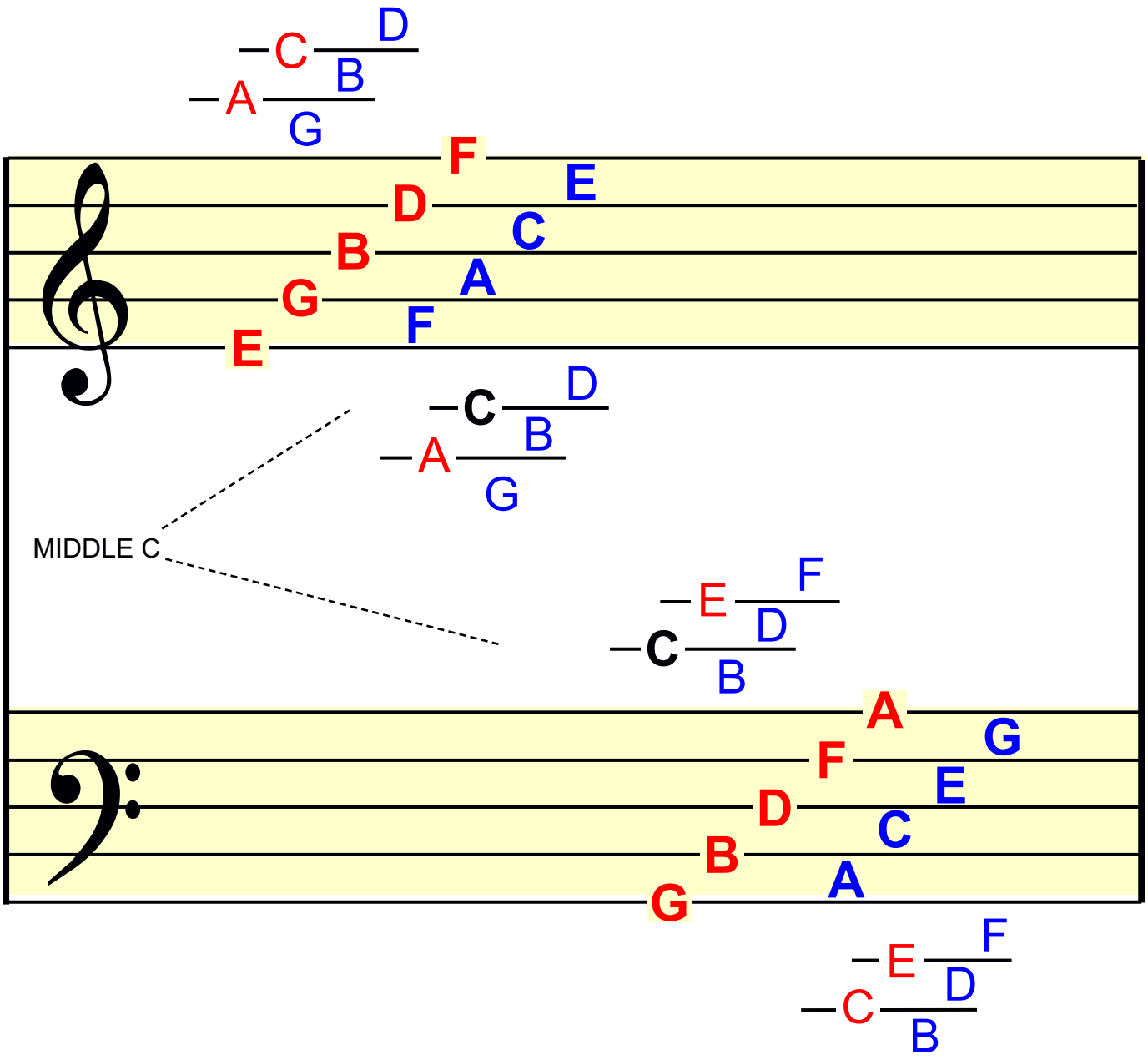
USE ALL THE C NOTES AS ROUGH GUIDES

Very often I will write in the names of the notes for you but you STILL have to know WHERE each note is. If you memorise the position of the C notes. this will help you 'get your bearings'.

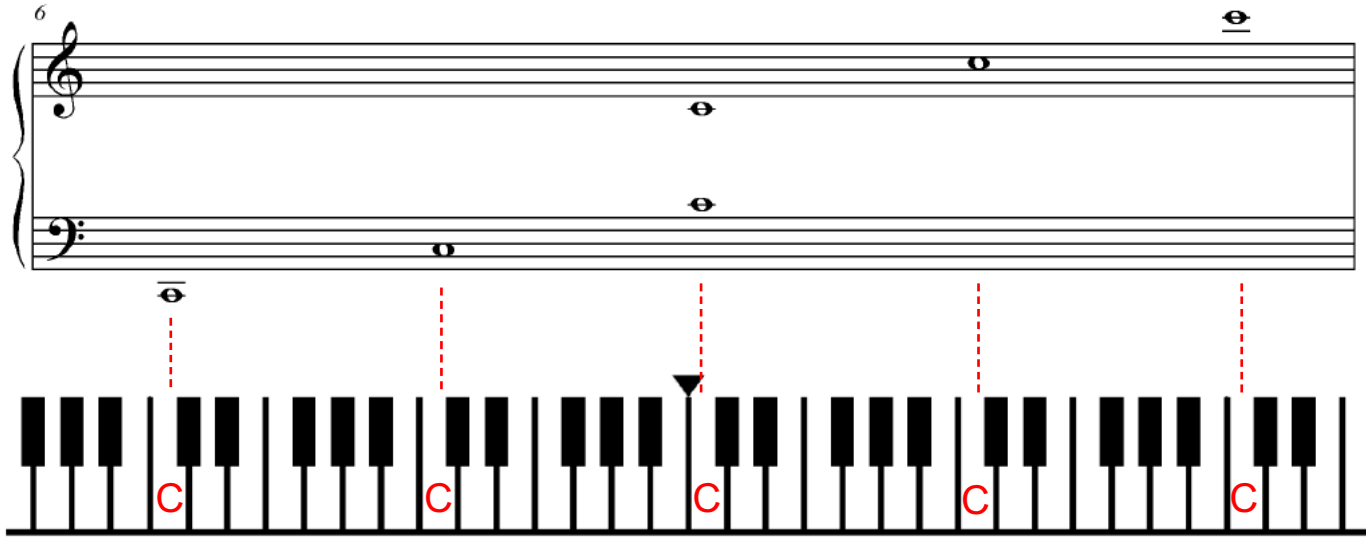


NOTE FINDER

Print this out



The position of the C's



ODDS & ENDS

PRACTICE HANDS SEPARATELY

Always practice both hands SEPARATELY before you attempt hands together.
If you try a tune with both hands and can't do it you get frustrated and give up.
When you practice hands SEPARATELY you get the sense that you WILL be able to do it - it will just take some practice.

SING THE MELODY AS YOU PLAY THE LEFT HAND

If you find it difficult to 'match' the two hands together try SINGING the right hand AS you play the left hand part a few times BEFORE you use your right hand.
Your brain is then able to translate this into your hand much easier.

USE A METRONOME

If you practice with a Metronome from the start you will have much better timing as you progress. When we play on our own we tend to take slightly longer over more difficult passages but don't really realise that we are behind the time. Try playing along with a metronome and you will see exactly what I mean.

BUY CHILDRENS SIGHT READING BOOKS (Second Hand if you can)

If you are really interested in taking sight reading seriously buy as many starter books as you can.

THE 'GOLDEN' RULE

Practice what you CAN'T play not what you CAN play.
This is the only sure way to improve.

USE THE 'THREE TIMES' PER SESSION RULE

When you are learning a difficult piece which you are tending to avoid - promise yourself to practice it THREE times each practice session. It doesn't matter if you make loads of mistakes just muddle through it three times then leave it. Be prepared to do this for several weeks before you see any improvement.
Then see what happens..

If you looks at the following pieces you will see that there are several devices that will help you along the way

CHORDS - PATTERNS - MOTIFS
All classical pieces are created using chords, patterns and motifs. Some are more obvious than others and you can use this to your advantage.

Since you now have a thorough understanding of chords and Inversions you will easily be able to pick them out in the following pieces. I have written in the various chords used to help you pick out the notes more easily.

Certain pieces also use very repetitive patterns and motifs. This allows you to concentrate on the notes themselves.

I HAVE NAMED SOME OF THE NOTES FOR YOU
I believe that half the incentive to learn to sight read comes from really enjoying being able to play these beautiful pieces. So why should you be deprived of this because it is so difficult to memorize the notes. In some pieces I have written in some or all of the notes so that you can play and enjoy the music. There may then be the same piece WITHOUT these visual clues on the next page. I will leave it up to you to decide whether you wish to play with a ‘safety net’ or not.

THE PIANOFORALL ‘RED DOT’ SIGHT READING AID
This is one of the simplest yet most effective sight reading aids you will ever try. Basically - I have made all sharp or flat notes RED so that you don’t have to figure it out yourself.
One of the most difficult aspects of sight reading is remembering which notes are sharp or flat depending which key you are playing in (see page 11) pianoforall takes care of this by simply making these notes RED.

Should you then wish to practice these tunes WITHOUT these helpful red dots simply photocopy the pieces on a black and white photocopier and hey presto - the red dots will be gone.

GOOD LUCK
Sight reading is not easy but it is a skill worth practicing. To be able to read and play what artists like Chopin and Beethoven actually wrote down is an incredible feeling. Keep practicing, you WILL get better day by day.